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NEW MIDDLE EASTERN REVIEWS

The Naqab Bedouin and Colonialism: New Perspectives

Mansour Nasasra, Sophie Richter-Devroe, Sarab Abu-Rabia-Queder & Richard Ratcliffe (eds.)

London, Routledge, 2015, 232 pp., \$98.86

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The Naqab – the southern region of historic Palestine – is increasingly becoming an established site of interest within Palestine studies. The edited volume *The Naqab Bedouin and Colonialism* documents the heritage of knowledge production on the Naqab and significantly advances the present wave of critical knowledge production building on the foundational works of authors including Aref al-Aref, Ismail Abu-Saad, Ghazi Falah and Oren Yiftachel. The volume advances the lineage of those authors by presenting a body of work that stands against the genre of orientalist and Zionist literature on the Naqab, which dominated scholarship up to the 1990s. A small community of predominantly young and Naqab-based scholars are leading concerted efforts to create this space of critical scholarship on the Naqab, of which this volume represents a central and significant effort. As such, this volume is essential reading for any researcher, practitioner or individual interested in Palestine and the Naqab, working with Naqab communities or critical knowledge production.

With nine chapters organized into three parts, the outstanding strength of the book is on charting a genealogy of the literature on the Naqab and the political life of Naqab Bedouin studies. What emerges clearly is the sustained agency of Palestinians in the Naqab over the decades and a collection of insights into what decolonizing research on the Naqab can look like. In the introductory chapter, Richard Ratcliffe and his co-editors call for politically conscious research based on principles of reflexive scholarship.

Part One focuses most clearly on the task of critically mapping the field and is composed of four of the nine total chapters. In the first chapter, Mansour Nasasra charts the Ottoman, British and Israeli regimes of control over Naqab Bedouin emphasizing the community's sustained resistance and refusal of foreign rule. Ilan Pappé writes against the absence of the Naqab in the literature of Palestine studies by tracking Zionist approaches to the indigenous community over the decades. In the contribution by Yuval Karplus and Avinoam Meir, they discuss a critical spatial approach to Israeli settler colonialism through a review of academic discourse on the Naqab. In the fourth chapter, Safa Aburabia draws on ethnographic research to show the affective and material relationships of Palestinians in the Naqab to the land.

Part Two is composed of three chapters and affirms Palestinian agency in the Naqab accomplished by focusing on civil society and advocacy initiatives organized around themes of the Israeli military rule era (1948 to 1966), feminist organizations and law-based activism. Drawing on British and Israeli archival materials balanced by oral history sources, Mansour Nasasra's chapter describes the Israeli military rule era emphasizing the means of resistance deployed by Palestinians who remained after the mass Nakba expulsion of 1948. Elisabeth

Marteu's contribution charts women's organizations in the Naqab since the 1990s and analyses the extent that they represent an alternative form of politics at the intersection of Israeli settler colonialism and patriarchal society. Finally, Ahmed Amara demonstrates Israeli law as a settler colonial institution while portraying Naqab Palestinian litigation in the Israeli Supreme Court as an anti-colonial, if severely limited, tactic.

The third part of the book consists of only one chapter in which Dr. Sarab Abu-Rabia-Queder ethnographically describes her journey through Israeli academia focusing on the process of research about Bedouin women and her own 'hybrid' identity. The volume positions itself as an intentional break from the heritage of governance-oriented colonial information produced by the Ottomans, British Mandate and Israeli regimes. More specifically, the volume is a rebuttal to the Zionist vision of the Naqab as an empty space where Palestinians are made invisible and must be expelled to satisfy the primacy of exclusive Jewish rights to land over Palestinian presence. Through a variety of approaches, the book demonstrates how colonization has served as a necessary and important process for Zionism over the past 70 years while departing from the Zionist settler-colonial paradigm of an essentialized and static Bedouin culture lacking agency and requiring modernization by force if necessary (e.g. ongoing home demolitions). Overall, the book documents and contributes to the emergence of a critical scholarship and builds towards an indigenous Palestinian vision of the Naqab community.

The Naqab Bedouin and Colonialism emerged from the 2010 workshop "Rethinking the Paradigms: Negev Bedouin Research 2000+" held at Exeter University, which is host to the European Centre for Palestine Studies. Reflecting similar intentions as the conference, the volume advances a decolonizing research agenda revolving around themes of the author, identity and knowledge production throughout the text while also writing back against the predominant colonial narratives about the Naqab. As such, the edited volume reflects the priorities of the younger contributing academics and their sensitivity to the prominent absence of Naqab Palestinians' voices in the previous decades of scholarship. In doing so, the editors prepared a decidedly alternative academic basis for future scholarship to inherit.

In addition to breaking with a hegemonic project of colonial research that existed in previous decades, the edited volume incorporates the often neglected Naqab community into the fold of 'Palestine studies' where the West Bank, Lebanese refugee camps or even the Galilee dominate the attention of most scholarship on Palestinians. The Naqab, however, is underrepresented even among the sub-community of Palestinians with Israeli citizenship. For example, although Naqab-based non-governmental organizations increased dramatically (from four in the 1990s to over eighty today), no Naqab research organization independent of Israeli state institutions has emerged in contrast to other areas with a density of Palestinians. As a result, the present volume intentionally prioritizes the unique history and experience that distinguishes the Naqab and its indigenous Bedouin population from the Palestinian experience more broadly.

The volume represents important progress in rectifying the imbalances and prejudices of scholarship within Palestine studies, yet a sorely missed element are the Palestinians of the Naqab who were forcibly displaced to the Gaza Strip and West Bank, Egypt and Jordan in the 1948 Nakba. 90% of the Palestinian and Bedouin population of the Naqab was expelled in 1948 and remain exiled refugees until today. Part of the problem is that the literature on the specific

community of Palestinian refugees from the Naqab is thin. Although Chapter Six by Mansour Nasasra addresses Naqab Palestinians internally displaced within what came to be Israel, future research into the Naqab remains burdened with the task of examining the present day relationship of refugees outside of the Naqab to those who remained. Adopting a firm position that incorporates this community into the fold of Naqab Bedouin studies is essential for understanding Naqab residents' present relationship to the settler-colonial Israeli state.

The emphasis on 'new perspectives', as the title states, is more than accurate. The book successfully describes and entrenches a break with the hegemonic field of research on the Naqab, specifically the previous two eras of British and Israeli rule. Naming the 'eras' – British and Israeli, imperialist and colonialist – is a form of claiming ownership over the present and the direction of future research. In addition to breaking from past genealogies, the editors seek to invigorate research that pursues decolonizing approaches to research on the Naqab. Mainly in the chapters by Mansour Nasasra, Safa Aburabia and Ahmad Amara, the volume prepares the reader for the conclusion that the Israeli brand of settler-colonialism has displacement and replacement at its root and therefore, decolonization will require a process of restitution and return. Yet, while colonial research and decolonizing intentions are frequently referenced, the volume also leaves the reader craving concrete recommendations for decolonizing research practices that are tailored to the Palestinian Naqab.

The political 'subject' – Naqab Bedouin Palestinians – described in the volume, is conscious of their history, resilient against the displacement targeting them and involved in advocacy of the case internationally. This is in line with Naqab youth activism and organizing that garnered unprecedented visibility in 2014 when grassroots political mobilization against the Praver Plan culminated with large rallies at which many Palestinians were injured and jailed by Israeli forces. Social and political activism are exciting arenas in the Naqab where new tactics are employed by the youth generations who are distinguishing themselves from the previous generations through their more comprehensive political claims and confrontational approaches. The volume does not directly address the most recent developments of grassroots activism and movement building. In contrast, the formal sector of civil society primarily in the form of non-governmental organizations does receive attention in particular from the chapters of Ahmad Amara and Elisabeth Marteu. As a result, the depiction that emerges over the course of the book is one that preempts a future Zionist argument that indigenous resistance is only a new phenomenon attributed to the latest generations and non-representative of the Naqab Bedouin community's historical amicability to the Israeli regime. Instead, the book establishes that younger members of the Naqab community are building upon the heritage of successive generations, a continuous struggle.

The collection of chapters achieves several important accomplishments. The authors demonstrate contemporary trends in research on Palestinians in the Naqab critical of and positioned in counter to establishment (Israeli) knowledge describing Palestinian Bedouin in the Naqab as ahistoric and nomadic. Within this argument is also a powerful contribution to challenging the Israeli state's claims of Bedouin transferability and non-existent land and rights claims. In doing so, the volume intentionally defies the settler-colonial prescription of the Bedouin in the Naqab as a passive and internally oppressed people. The editors' ability to do this in many of the chapters and as a compiled whole is a huge success. Yet, the volume also leaves one wondering – what

are the initiatives and actions that push past affirming common humanity, historicity and agency? What to do with all that will power, culture and community detailed over 218 pages? Attention to informal organizations and attempts at struggle outside of academia and non-governmental organizations would serve greatly in filling this gap. Publishing the chapters in Arabic would enable the use of this scholarship in community education and popular political action.